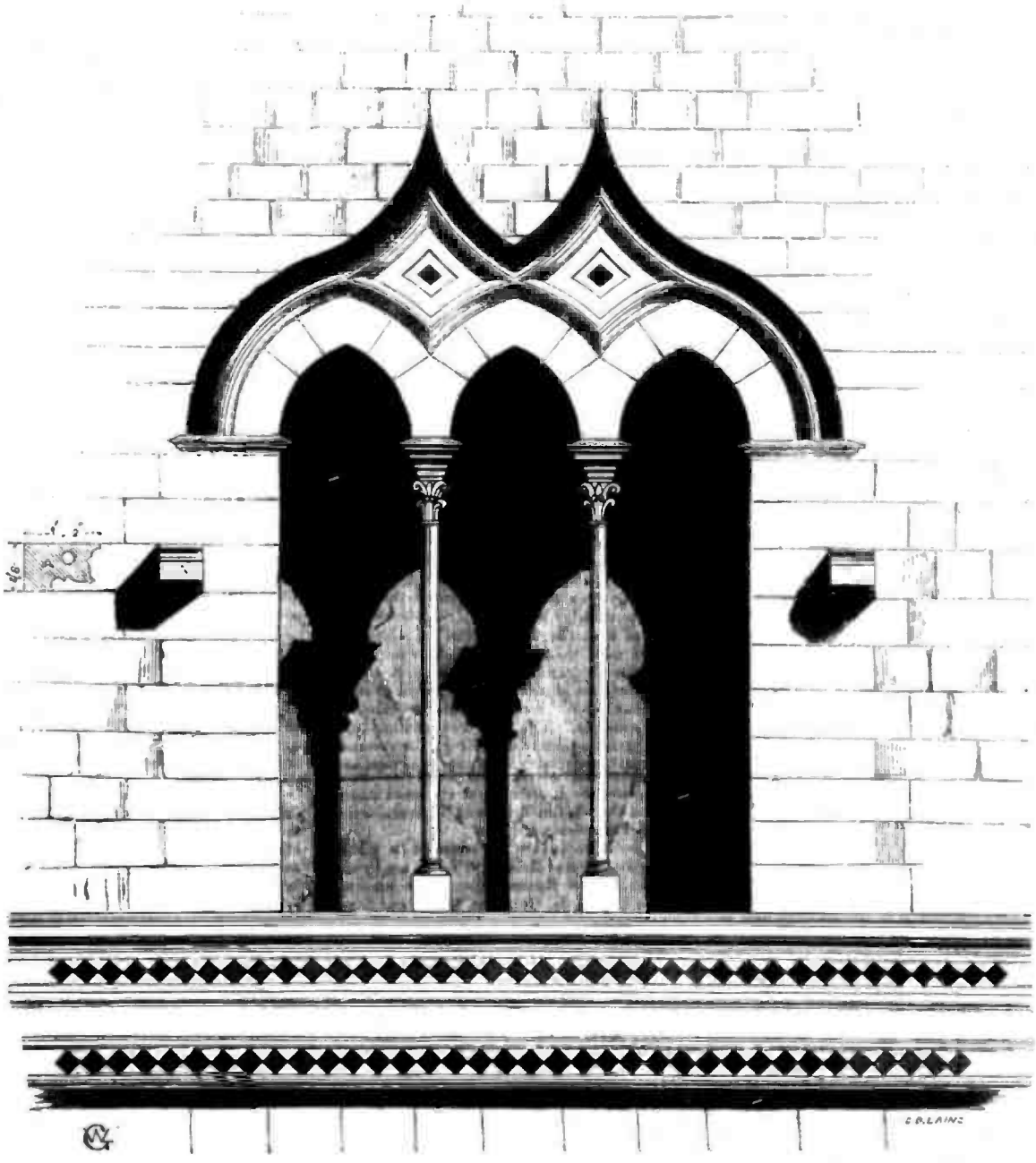
NORMAN SICILIAN ARCHITECTURE.

WINDOW FROM PALAZZO CORVAIO: TAORMINA.



Saracen added his own style to those which preceded him, introducing the pointed and horse shoe arch, the Byzantine dome, the minaret, the honeycomb ornament, and profuse mural decorations.

The mosaics now covering the walls of the most splendid Norman buildings, are of Byzantine origin, executed by the Sicilian Greeks, who, previous to the arrival of the Normans, had probably learned the art of their own brethren at Byzantium.

It is the amalgamation of the several features we have enumerated, which characterizes the Norman Saracenic architecture in Sicily.

The engraving given above is a representation of one of the front windows in the first story of the Palazzo Corvaio, at Taormina. It was erected about A.D. 1180, under the Norman rule, and is a solid, well executed structure, possessing very considerable merits in its design. Immediately under the window, in the frieze of the ground floor, the cornice of which is composed in excellent taste, runs the following inscription (not any part of which is shewn in the engraving), in the bad Latin of the times: — "*Deum deligere prudencia est · Iesum imitari justicia, nullis inuersis ab eo abstrahi fortitudo est · nullis illegebris emmoliri temperancia est · et in his sunt actus vertutum · Par domus celo set minore Dño.*

In the general design of this window we would notice the manner in which the hood moulding is carried up over the three pointed arches, forming itself into two intersecting ogees, partially developed, a characteristic of a much later style in our country. We cannot fail to acknowledge also the great elegance produced by the two slender marble colonettes dividing the window into three compartments, each of which has for its head the pointed arch. The employment of the lava as a means of ornament is not altogether forgotten.

Taormina possesses numberless remains of Norman architecture, which, together with its magnificent position, elevated high above the Ionian sea, overlooking the coasts of Calabria and the giant Etna, cannot fail to strike the least sensible with some degree of interest. The Saracens, after severe and lengthened contests, became masters of the town at the death of the Emperor Bazilius; but the eastern government some little time after regained possession of it, and retained it until A.D. 961, when it again fell into the hands of the Mahommedans, and the Caliph Abulasaem entered it, and destroyed almost every building. At length the Normans drove out the Saracens, and as it naturally presented a peculiarly strong military position, they made it a town of head quarters, building for themselves princely dwellings. Their ruins, and those of a Roman theatre of considerable antiquarian interest, together with miserable filth, abject poverty, and the gorgeous scenery viewed from the town, alone remain to greet the traveller after his hard earned ascent to the summit.

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